

Camaraderie Renews a Veteran's Commitment to Serve

'Being part of my local VFW Post 1513 has been so empowering, especially during the COVID-19 crisis'

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Rocio Villanueva is **#StillServing** as a member of VFW Post 1513 in Escondido, California. She served in the U.S. Army for eight years, including a deployment to Iraq, and credits the VFW with helping her find what she was missing after returning home.

“Transitioning from the military was really difficult for me. I felt like I had no purpose in life. I loved my job as a 21C bridge engineer, but due to medical problems I couldn’t continue with my military career,” Villanueva recalled.

“After getting out, it was very hard to find the camaraderie I once had until I met the members of my local VFW. They welcomed me and my family.”

Getting involved with the VFW connected Villanueva to new ways to serve and gave her the opportunity to keep making a difference. She sees volunteering as a continuation of what she learned in the military.

“The idea of ‘never leave the fallen comrades’ in the civilian world is looking out for one another,” said Villanueva.

“Volunteering will bring us all closer to our common goal of taking care of our fellow veterans.”

When the pandemic began, Villanueva couldn’t imagine anything other than stepping up to help wherever needed. She has sewn and donated more than 4,000 face masks for first responders, essential workers, medical personnel, veterans and Navajo nations.

Villanueva also worked with a church to restore defective N-95 face masks for the San Diego County Office of Emergency Services, helped several veterans organizations with food distribution and delivered food to the homes of cancer patients. In addition, she’s donated

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blood and opted to be part of a COVID-19 vaccine trial.

In the worst times of her life, Villanueva met caring people and it means a lot to her to now be able to assist others. She's grateful for the role the VFW has played in her service efforts and proud of all that her Post does.

"Being part of my local VFW Post 1513 has been so empowering, especially during the COVID-19 crisis. Our Post and Auxiliary are always willing to do anything necessary to help others," Villanueva said.

"Through the pandemic they've helped many veterans and their families with food deliveries, home care visits, emergency bill assistance and more. They're working on a stand-down currently, despite struggles with the pandemic. Post 1513 won't stop until there are no more veterans on the streets or hurting."

Villanueva believes individual efforts to serve are needed, but that much more is accomplished when people come together and work as a team. She loves being a part of making that happen as a VFW member.

"The VFW is camaraderie. This is why I'm proud to say 'I am the VFW,'" stated Villanueva.

"I am the VFW because it's about having a genuine connection with those that I help in my community."

To find out more about the VFW's #StillServing campaign or to share your story, visit [vfw.org/StillServing](https://www.vfw.org/StillServing).