

# 'This is Life-Changing for Our Patients'

## **A VFW Post in Massachusetts donated \$129,000 for a new trolley to transport patients around a local VA hospital campus**

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They gathered on an afternoon stitched in gray, serenaded by a brass band playing on the manicured lawn of the American Legion Pavilion at the local VA hospital in Bedford, Massachusetts.

Several dozen veterans, many confined to wheelchairs, welcomed a new trolley draped in the proverbial red, white and blue of their beloved nation on June 23, a \$129,000 donation by VFW Post 1105 members in nearby Watertown, Massachusetts.

"We saw a need," Post 1105 Commander Derek Mayerhofer said. "We had the means to help, and the veterans deserved it."

Alongside members of Post 1105, Mayerhofer unveiled the custom-made trolley, enhanced with a chairlift and large removable windows, as a gift to residents and staff of the Bedford VA hospital to use for campus navigation.

Mayerhofer then joined Director of VA Bedford Healthcare Joan Clifford in the ribbon-cutting ceremony, a prelude to the much-anticipated inaugural ride for many patients of the hospital around its campus.

"We had the old trolley for over 25 years," Clifford said. "The VFW volunteered to purchase this for us when ours kept breaking down. This trolley ended up costing about \$129,000, so not a small amount that they donated to us."

In early 2021, the members of Post 1105, 13 miles southeast of Bedford, sold their longtime building to an Alexandria-based real estate company in Virginia for a large sum. With the newly arrived influx of cash, Post members soon began voting on ways to help veterans in and around their community with the proceeds.

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“We sold our building in Watertown for \$1.2 million, so when we found out they were doing a fundraiser for a new trolley, member Dominic Ricci made a motion to donate \$10,000,” Post Quartermaster Ed Aucoin said. “Then I said, ‘Wait a minute, why don’t we donate the whole amount?’ ”

In keeping up with the VFW motto ‘No One Does More for Veterans,’ Aucoin and Post 1105 reached out to the VA hospital’s personnel and surprised them with a sizeable donation after their more than two-year fundraising campaign.

“This is life-changing for our patients,” said Laurel Holland, a VA Voluntary Service Chief at the Bedford VA healthcare system. “They have been through the pandemic for two years with loads of restrictions and no fun. Then suddenly, this joy comes in. Not only are they going to have a great time, but they will be able to ride around the campus on this gorgeous trolley hanging out the window, honking and waving like the celebrities they are. People will give them so much love.”

The patients sported smiles while being wheeled by hospital staff onto the trolley, sitting with their heads poking out of the windows as it rolled off in motion to a soundtrack of old songs being played by the brass band.

For one of the many Post 1105 members in attendance, their smiles were worth more than any six-figure check could cash.

“I was filled with a sense of honor that our VFW Post was able to assist fellow veterans in such a meaningful way in their hour of need,” said George MacMasters, a combat veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan. “I can only imagine how difficult it must have been for the veterans to be locked down in the hospital for two years due to COVID, and how liberated they must feel now riding around the hospital campus in a new trolley enjoying the sunshine and fresh air.”

Post 1105 members, who now rent the Pvt. Charles J. Shutt Marine Corps League building for VFW gatherings in Watertown, invested part of the money from the sale of their former Post home.

They now use the interest from this investment to fund several other veterans’ programs throughout the area.

“We invested the money with a financial advisor and have been using the interest to fund and sponsor training of service dogs, horse therapy programs for veterans with PTSD, as well as purchasing the trolley for the hospital,” MacMasters said. “We are now in the process of buying a van for a veterans’ program that works with returning veterans.”

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